DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 252 839 CS 007 909

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TITLE A Comparative Study of Journals for Teachers of Reading and Their Contributions to Comprehension Instruction Methodology.
PUB DATE 30 Nov 84
NOTE 21p.; Paper presented at the Fall Conference of the Rhode Island State Council of the International Reading Association (Newport, RI, November 30, 1984).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Comparative Analysis; *Content Analysis; Elementary Secondary Education; *Reading Comprehension; *Reading Instruction; *Reading Research; *Scholarly Journals; Teaching Methods
IDENTIFIERS Journal of Reading; Reading Improvement (Journal); Reading Teacher (Journal); Reading World (Journal)

ABSTRACT

A study analyzed and compared the content of four reading journals to determine the extent to which articles concretely described strategies for teaching comprehension or for following up on comprehension instruction. A total of 654 articles from 1973 and 1983 were content analyzed for eight categories of comprehension instruction and three categories of comprehension follow-up. The results indicated the publication of a substantially larger number of articles dealing with comprehension instruction and follow-up in the 1983 issues of "The Reading Teacher," "Journal of Reading," and "Reading World," compared with the 1973 issues. "Reading Improvement" displayed a marked decrease in the percentage of articles on comprehension and follow-up. The findings suggest a need for teaching strategies that foster such influences as syntax and passage structure and monitoring on text comprehension, as well as for manuscripts describing strategies reflecting these components. (HTH)

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ED252839

A Comparative Study of Journals for Teachers of Reading And Their Contributions to Comprehension Instruction Methodology

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A Comparative Study of Journals for

Teachers of Reading And Their Contributions to Comprehension

Instruction Methodology

Abstract

This study analyzed and compared the content of four reading journals for the years 1973 and 1983 on eight categories of comprehension instruction and three categories of comprehension follow up. Of specific interest was the extent to which articles concretely described strategies for teaching comprehension or for following up on comprehension instruction according to specified definitions for each category.

The findings of this study suggest the engineering of teaching strategies which foster such influences as syntax and passage structure and monitoring on text comprehension as well as the submission of manuscripts describing strategies reflecting these components.

A Comparative Study of Journals for Teachers of Reading And Their Contributions to Comprehension Instruction Methodology

Background and Purpose

Observational research completed over the past decade (Durkin, 1978-1979; 1981; Mason, 1983) has demonstrated that little is being done in the classroom in the area of reading comprehension instruction. Noting that classroom teachers rely mainly on basal manuals for the teaching of reading, Durkin did a content analysis of the manuals of five popular basal readers (K-6) to determine what they suggested for comprehension instruction methodology. Durkin found that manuals gave "far more attention to assessment and practice than to direct explicit instruction" and that "when procedures for teaching children how to comprehend are provided, they tend to be brief." (Durkin, 1981; p. 515)

A literature review uncovered little other research indicating the extent to which sources of reading instructional methodology such as basals, professional texts and journals offered qualitative suggestions on how various comprehension tasks can be taught. With Durkin's findings rousing suspicion that perhaps teachers are not being given much guidance by reading method experts on how to help students develop comprehension skills, at least one author observed with respect to journal offerings that while in many cases contributors discuss and conduct experiments pertaining to theories of reading comprehension, they infrequently concern themselves with instructional implications. Mavrogenes (1983) stated:

> Frequently, . . . even if /contributors/ do acknowledge that the theories imply teaching ideas, this acknoledgement may be so brief or so abstract as to be useless, at least to classroom teachers. /They/ do not address the crucial question on how to actually get children to explore, define, become aware, fit what they read into what they know. (p. 297)

Given the concern over how little teaching of reading comprehension is occurring, the present study was undertaken to determine the extent to which selected journals frequently used by teachers contribute concrete descriptions of teaching strategies for developing comprehension. The four journals chosen for examination were The Reading Teacher (RT), The Journal of Reading (JR), Reading World (RW), and Reading Improvement (RI), all of which have as a main thrust the development of literacy and the dessimination of knowledge on how this can be done.

In light of research evidence suggesting the desirability of prior knowledge (Smith, 1978); word meaning (Freebody and Anderson, 1983); syntax familiarity (Pearson, 1974-1975; and Richek, 1976-1977): schema availability (Freebody and Anderson, 1983) as well as certain word recognition and monitoring skills (Wagoner, 1983) to reading comprehension; it was deemed useful within the context of this study to ascertain which components of comprehension ability are receiving attention in the selected periodicals and which, if any, are receiving little or no attention. Findings pertaining to this latter question would point out those components which need to be clearly and concretely addressed by designers of instructional methods in future journal publications.

Theory development and research pertaining to the nature of reading comprehension has increased dramatically over the past decade. It was thus deemed interesting to compare journal offerings pertaining to methods of teaching comprehension within the 1983-84 volumes with those offerings in volumes one decade ago to determine if certain components are being emphasized more or less in present offerings than they were one decade ago.

Methodology

In order to implement this study it was necessary to carefully define comprehension instruction. Durkin previously described comprehension instruction as "anything that is done by the teacher to help students acquire reading

ability and which includes efforts to teach children the meaning of a unit larger than a word (i.e. phrases, sentences and paragraphs) and teaches them to work out the meaning of such units." (Durkin, 1978-1979) Mason described text level instruction in terms of a core sequence suggested by AU (cited in Mason, 1983). This sequence included anything a teacher would do to 1) introduce written text centering around children's previous experience; 2) guide children's reading and 3) help them analyze and interpret written text. Two other categories in addition to the core were suggested in the work of Wilson (1981; p. 325f.): 4) word recognition and 5) word meaning within written text could be implemented either before or after implementation of the core sequence or even within the core itself.

Piloting of this study; consideration of Durkin's schema of instructional strategies (1978-1979) and further readings suggested several other categories for consideration. These included anything a teacher would do to enhance development and understanding of 6) syntactic structures within written text; and 7) paragraph organization or schema within longer written text. Finally, category 8) comprehension monitoring was included . . . referring to any teaching activity or strategy which might be used to help students become aware of the status of their understanding as they read text. Like categories 4 and 5, it was felt that teaching strategies pertaining to categories 6, 7 and 8 could be implemented before, after or within the core sequence.

Three other categories having to do with teacher action with reference to comprehension but pertaining to follow up to instruction rather than comprehension instruction itself were used to analyze articles within selected journals. These included 9) comprehension assignment, 10) comprehension assessment and 11) comprehension application. . . all of which were discussed by Durkin in her article.

Definitions by example of each of the categories mentioned follow:

	Category	Definition
Core Activities or Strategies	1. Text Introduction (TI)	Any pre-reading activities or strategies which might help children relate their prior knowledge to what is to be read or which generates purpose for reading specific material. Such would include the use of advanced organizers of various sorts including questions or discussion which promotes comprehension once the person begins to read. Within a Language Experience Approach, any brainstorming activities and or directions which lead to the writing of material later to be used for reading.
	2. Guided Reading (GR)	Any activities or strategies used to help the student focus on specific or general ideas within the text currently being read. Such would include directions which encourage children to raise questions as they read (i.e. The Request Technique)or teacher questioning which advances various comprehension abilities(i.e questions which encourage prediction). Within the Language Experience Approach, any strategies which help students develop a piece of writing once it is in process.
	3. Text Discussion (TD)	Any activities or strategies which foster discussion, analysis and/or interpretation of text which has just been read. This includes directives to re-read to find information or to prove a point.
	4. Word Recognition (WR)	Any activities or strategies which help students to decode unknown words so that comprehension of specific text is not inhibitied. This includes guidance given in the use of sound patterns and/or morphemic patterns of words as well as any of various types of context clues appropriate to the text in question

	Category	Definition
Core Activities or Strategies	5. Word Meaning (WM)	Any activities or strategies which help students arrive at the meaning of the word in relation to specific text. Included are those strategies which expand words found in a piece of reading material (i.e. semantic webbing, feature analysis, dictionary usage).
	6. Grammatical Aspects (GA)	Any activities or strategies which address unfamiliar syntactic elements found in a specific piece of text. This includes strategies clarifying the effect of certain parts of speech within a sentence.(i.e. appositives, connectives) as well as strategies which encourage sentence breakdown and recombining. Strategies which encourage the effect of punctuation on meaning of what is being read.
	7. Passage Structure (PS)	Strategies which facilitate awareness of of organizational patterns within a piece of text (i.e. paragraph frames, instructional frameworks, structured overviews and other guides which promote schema awareness.
	8. Comprehension Monitoring (CM)	Any strategies or activities used by the teacher to help students realize when they know and when they can not know the meaning of what they have read.
	9. Comprehension Assignment (Assign)	Any written assignment which gives students practice with comprehension techniques previously taught. Such an assignment is not done under teacher supervision.
Follow Up Activities	10. Comprehension Assessment (Assess)	Questions calling for the student to recall points of information made in text but for which there is no consequent teacher action.
	11. Comprehension Application (Applic)	Any activities or strategies which determine whether students are applying previous instruction in comprehension to text not used in instruction. Such activites are done under teacher supervision

The content of all articles in both the 1973 and 1983 volumes in each journal was examined to determine if it did or did not prescribe instructional strategies pertaining to comprehenshion. Articles on comprehension instruction were further analyzed to see which of the eleven components described above they addressed.[1]

For example, the article in the October, 1983 issue of The Reading Teacher entitled "C^6: A reading model for teaching arithmetic story problem solving" (Reutzel) presented a strategy reflecting categories 1, 3, 5, 6, 7 and 8. In the article, strategies for teaching word recognition (category 4); assigning comprehension tasks related to instruction (category 9); assessing comprehension (category 10) and applying comprehension instruction (category 11) were not addressed or at most vaguely described. Conversely, the article "Another look at oral questions for comprehension" found in the January 1983 issue of The Reading Teacher (Farrar) described only the Comprehension Assessment Component (category 10), albeit quite elaborately.

If a teaching strategy reflecting a component was clearly described in an article, either once or several times, that article was coded with a plus (+) for that component. If the component was not addressed, the article received a zero (0) for that component on a prescribed data sheet (See figure 1). Plus signs were totaled and translated into percentages reported in the finding section.

A total of 654 articles (254 from RI; 224 from JR; 91 from RI and 85 from RW) from 46 journals (16 from RI; 16 from JR; 6 from RI and 8 from RW) were content analyzed. Of these 198 articles from 14 journals (approximately 30% selected randomly from each journal sample) were separately analyzed by both investigators yeilding a percentage of agreement on the component categories (+ and 0) of 93.7%.[2]

Findings

Table 1 shows the mean percentage of articles dealing with comprehension instruction published in each volume of each journal for 1973 and 1983.

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Insert Table 1 about here.

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Table 2 presents the mean proportional extent to which each of the four journals described strategies reflecting each of the categories previously defined.

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Insert Table 2 about here.

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As the increased research focus on comprehension processing might lead us to expect the finding of this study indicate the publication of a substantially larger number of articles dealing with comprehension instruction and follow up in the 1983 issues of The Reading Teacher, Journal of Reading, and Reading World as compared to the 1973 issues of the same journals. Content analysis of Reading Improvement displayed a marked decrease in the percentage of articles on comprehension instruction and follow up. This finding may reflect the smaller number of issues in the sample coupled with the fact that only one issue in the 1983 volume contained the bulk of articles describing any strategies or activities pertaining to comprehension development (Fall/Winter, 1983). One half of the articles in that issue focussed on comprehension instruction and/or follow up as opposed to 1/6 of the Spring issue and none in the summer issue. It must be noted however, that the other three journals examined also occasionally utilized the theme option so that one and sometimes two of the issues for a volume year contained no articles discribing comprehension strategies and/or activities.

Overall, and within specific journals the comprehension instruction components reflected in categories 1, 2 and 3 were the most frequently described in both 1973 and 1983. However, in 1983, articles describing how to introduce text; how to guide reading and how to discuss text (categories 1, 2 and 3) doubled and sometimes tripled in appearance in comparison to 1973. In the authors' opinions, with respect to categories 1, 2 and 3, the contents being dissiminated in 1983 might be described as more of the same as that being discribed in 1973 with perhaps a new twist here and there.

Conversely, comprehension instruction components reflected in categories 6, 7 and 8 (grammatical aspects; passage structure; and comprehension monitoring were the least addressed in both 1973 and 1983; inspite of the comparatively larger number of articles addressing these categories in 1983. Content being described with respect to categories 6 and 7 in the more recent volume appears to be fresh and new in nature.

The Journal of Reading and the Reading Teacher published more articles describing strategies or activities pertaining to category 4 (word recognition) and category 5 (word meaning) in the 1983 than in 1973 while Reading World for 1983 remained constant with the 1973 volume. Reading Improvement for 1983 showed a substantial decrease in its number of offerings on these categories when comparing it with the 1973 volume.

With exception of The Reading Teacher the journals portrayed a substantial drop in its publication of articles which merely described comprehension assessment (category 10) fomented by Durkin's classroom observation research . . . that teachers must do something constructive when students give wrong answers to questions.

In all, articles describing techniques which might be used for comprehension assignment and application purposes showed some growth in appearance albeit, less drammatically than the first three categories included in the analysis.

Conclusions

The purpose of this article is not to promote criticism or praise of any one journal. Rather, its purpose is to raise the consciousness of creative methodologists and potential authors with respect to the comprehension components which are receiving the least attention in the literature used by instructors interested in improving their teaching skills. In light of the evidence suggesting the importance of schema developments, syntactic awareness and self monitoring skills for comprehension, the findings of this study encourage the engineering of teaching strategies, pertaining to these areas as well as the submission of manuscripts describing these strategies and related activities.

It may be that those instructional components pertaining to the core sequence (Categories 1, 2 and 3) are receiving adequate attention in the literature directed at reading teachers. Other components which need to be addressed either before during or within the core sequence seem to need further attention however.

Durkin, Dolores. What classroom observations reveal about reading comprehension instruction. Reading Research Quarterly, 1978-1979, 14, 481-533.

Durkin, Dolores. Reading comprehension instruction in five basal reader series. Reading Research Quarterly, 1981, 16, 515-544.

Farrar, Mary Thomas. Another look at oral questions for comprehension. The Reading Teacher, 1983, 36, 370-374.

Freebody, Peter and Anderson, Richard C. Effects of vocabulary difficulty, text cohesion, and schema availability on reading comprehension. Reading Research Quarterly, 1983, 18, 277-294.

Mason, Jana M. An examination of reacing instruction in third and fourth grades. The Reading Teacher, 1983, 36, 906-913.

Mavrogenes, Nancy A. Teaching Implications of the Schemata Theory of Comprehension. Reading World, 1983, 3, 295-299.

Pearson, P. David. Effects of grammatical complexity on children's comprehension recall and conception of certain semantic relations. Reading Research Quarterly, 1974-1974, 10, 115-192.

Reutzel, D. Ray. C^6: A reading model for teaching arithmetic story problem solving. The Reading Teacher, 1983, 37, 28-35.

Richek, Margaret, Reading Comprehension of anaphoric forms in varying linguistic contexts. Reading Research Quarterly, 1976-1977, 12, 145-165.

Smith, Frank. Understanding Reading (2nd ed.). New York: Holt Rinehart, & Winston, 1978.

Wagoner, Shirley A. Comprehension monitoring: What it is and what we know about it. Reading Research Quarterly, 1983, 18, 328-246.

Wilson, Robert M. Diagnostic and Remedial Reading for Classroom and Clinic. Columbus: Charles E. Merrill, 1981.

Footnotes

[1]It was noted during analysis that a small number of articles addressed the students themselves offering self help comprehension techniques. These received appropriate plusses in the content analysis.

[2] The four issues examined together by both investigators during the initial stage of the study were not included in sample used to establish interrator reliability.

Table 1

Mean Percentage of Articles Dealing With Comprehension Instruction in the 1973 and 1983 Volumes of Four Journals

Journal	YEAR 1973	1983
Reading Teacher	18.17	43.95
Journal of Reading	30.70	41.33
Reading Improvement	31.90	22.22
Reading World	28.13	31.61

Table 2

Mean Proportional Extent to Which Four Journals Described Strategies Reflecting Eleven Comprehension Components

Journal & Year		Components										
		TI	GR	TD	WR	WM	GA	PS	CM	Assign	Assess	Applic
Reading Teacher	1973	8.34	5.76	5.77	5.90	3.66	2.52	1.43	2.35	6.11	2.97	1.97
	1983	29.16	24.74	23.03	13.52	22.71	12.26	10.50	6.54	9.21	16.42	11.21
Journal of Reading	1973	17.89	11.87	13.70	4.02	7.68	3.87	2.77	2.97	10.65	11.30	5.65
	1983	28.77	25.16	17.78	9.29	15.38	5.87	6.61	11.51	15.81	10.36	7.36
Reading World	1973	15.63	12.50	9.28	6.25	12.50	6.25	0.00	0.00	6.25	12.50	0.00
	1983	26.07	24.29	22.62	5.00	12.62	3.87	7.92	5.12	7.62	8.33	5.84
Reading Improvement	1973	6.82	4.44	4.60	2.22	11.42	0.00	0.00	2.22	4.44	20.47	4.44
	1983	8.46	6.08	8.46	0.00	0.00	2.38	0.00	4.76	2.38	14.28	2.38
Total Means	1973	12.17	5.67	8.36	4.60	9.73	3.16	1.05	1.88	6.86	11.87	3.02
Total Means	1983	23.11	20.06	17.97	6.95	12.67	6.09	6.25	6.98	8.76	12.35	6.70

Reviewer: _____

Journal: _____

Month: _____

Year: _____

ARTICLES	1 TEXT INTRODUCTION	2 GUIDED READING	3 TEXT DISCUSSION	4 WORD RECOGNITION	5 WORD MEANING	6 GRAMMATICAL ASPECTS	7 PASSAGE STRUCTURE	8 COMPREHENION MONITORING	9 COMPREHENION ASSIGNMENT	10 COMPREHENION ASSESSEMENT	11 COMPREHENION APPLICATION	Notes

Figure 1.